

Message Text

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CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENGLAND

CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE//AEAGD-T

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL ANTWERP

USMISSION NATO

USNMR SHAPE

COMSCELM BREMERHAVEN GE

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GE

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

CDR MTMC WASHDC

CDR COMSC WASHDC

CDR 4TH TRANS BDE OBERDURSEL GE

CDR USATTGE RODM NETHERLANDS

RUEOBME COMSCLANT BAYONNE NJ

DIA WASHDC

MSCO ROTTERDAM NETHERLANDS

HQ BENELUX TERMINAL/CO/ROTTERDAM

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 01690

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MMOL, MARR, NATO, BE, US

SUBJECT: POTENTIAL OF GHENT AS MUNITIONS HANDLING PORT

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SUMMARY: IN CONJUNCTION WITH INVESTIGATION OF PORT OF GHENT FOR SUPPORT OF REFORGER 76, U.S. REPS CONDUCTED EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS WITH GHENT PORT OFFICIALS TO DETERMINE VIABILITY OF PORT FOR MUNITIONS SHIPMENTS. PROBE INDICATED PORT CLEARANCE CAPABILITY EXCELLENT AND PORT OFFICIALS RECEPTIVE TOWARD AMMO TRAFFIC. GHENT CONSIDERED POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO ZEEBRUGGE FOR MUNITIONS HANDLING, BUT RECOMMEND ANY FOLLOW-ON ACTIONS SHOULD BE DELAYED UNTIL CLEARED RESOLUTION OF ZEEBRUGGE SITUATION.

1. (U) AT INVITATION OF PORT OF GHENT COMMANDANT, REPRESENTATIVES FROM MAAG BELLUS, AMCONGEN ANTWERP, USATTGE ROTTERDAM, MSC ROTTERDAM, AND BELGIAN MOD MET WITH PORT OF GHENT OFFICIALS INCLUDING COMMANDANT DE WILDE ON 13 FEB TO DISCUSS PRIMARILY THE PORT'S CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT LINE OF COMMUNICATIONS REQUIREMENTS FOR NATO EXERCISE REFORGER 76. REPORT THAT SUBJECT TO INVOLVED AGENCIES DISTRIBUTED SEPARATELY BY USATTGE ROTTERDAM.

2. (U) PRIOR TO GHENT MEETING, PORT COMMANDANT MADE IT BE KNOWN INFORMALLY THROUGH BELGIAN MOD OFFICIALS THAT GHENT ALSO INTERESTED IN DISCUSSION US MUNITIONS HANDLING TRAFFIC WITH US REPS. FOLLOWING SUMMARIZES EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS LATTER SUBJECT.

3. (C) ACCORDING TO DE WILDE, SINCE OPENING OF ENLARGED CANAL BETWEEN TERNEUZEN, THE NETHERLANDS AND GHENT TO OCEANGOING SHIPS IN EARLY 70'S, NO MUNITIONS TRAFFIC HAS BEEN HANDLED BY THIS WATERWAY OR PORT OF GHENT. WITHIN PAST MONTH, HOWEVER, GHENT HAS APPROVED BOTH THE ENTRY FOR A UK LSL TYPE SHIP NORMALLY USED FOR ZEEBRUGGE-UK MUNITIONS SHIPMENTS AN A UK CARGO SHIP CARRYING UNDETERMINED MUNITIONS. NO FURTHER DETAILS PROVIDED EXECEPT THAT LATTER SHIP SCHEDULDE FOR APRIL 1976 AND WILL HANDLE ONLY CONTAINERIZED AMMO.

4. (C) IN MENTIONING THESE UK OPERATIONS, COMMANDANT DE WILDE EXPRESSED RECEPTIVENESS OF GHENT MUNICIPAL AND PORT OFFICIALS TO ACCOMMODATE U.S. AMMO SHIPMENTS. HE CITED TWO KILOMETER PLUS DISTANCE BETWEEN AMMO HANKLING PIER AND CONFIDENTIAL

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POPULATED AREA, MODERN PIER HANDLING EQUIPMENT, EXCEPTIONAL PORT CLEARANCE CAPABILITY, AVAILABILITY OF STEVEDORES, FAST TRANSIT FROM SLUSHING TO GHENT, EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH DUTCH OFFICIALS, INTERNATIONAL NATURE OF CANAL TO TERNEUZEN, AND OTHER POSITIVE FACTORS. COMMENT: IN THIS EXPLORATORY DISCUSSION, US REPS DID NOT REQUEST AND DID NOT RECEIVE AMPLIFYING INFO TO SUBSTANTIATE ALL THESE CLAIMS. OBSERVATION BY US REPS OF SELECTED PORT AREAS DID INDICATE PORT

FACILITIES AND CLEARANCE WERE ENTIRELY ADEQUATE AND MUNITIONS OPERATIONS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE PORT OF GHENT IS LOCATED ABOUT 30 KM INLAND BY CANAL VIA A LOCK AT TERNEUZEN ON THE SCHELDE. PILOT WOULD BE REQUIRED FROM NORTH SEA TO GHENT.

5. (C) ALTHOUGH BOTH BELGIAN MOD AND PORT OF GHENT AUTHORITIES PRESENT AT MEETING EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO EXAMINE SUBJECT THOROUGHLY IN FOLLOW-ON DISCUSSIONS, NO COMMITMENT WAS MADE. EMBASSY CONSIDERS THAT ANY SUCH ACTIVITY AT THIS TIME COULD NEGATE OR JEOPARDIZE THE GOVT OF BELGIUM'S ONGOING EFFORTS AS DISCUSSED REFS TO RESCIND OR AMELIORATE THE CURRENT ADVERSE RESTRICTIONS AFFECTING MUNITIONSS SHIPMENTS THROUGH ZEEBRUGGE. IF THIS EFFORT PROVES UNPRODUCTIVE, THE CASE FOR THE PORT OF GHENT COULD BE PURSUED. RENNER

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